

## Robert Curvin Interview: Fred & Joan Waring

Fred: Well I got involved in Newark mainly as a result of a demonstration at \_\_\_\_ Gardens in Bloomfield. Joan and I had recently moved into this area and I was teaching art Rutgers in Newark and CORE demonstrated outside.

At the time this was when the southern civil rights was so overwhelming and persuasive. Something had to be done so I said well I should join the demonstration. I did that, that led to contact with Bob Curvin and others at CORE.

I started going to CORE meetings down in Newark. Can't exactly recall where, I think some churches, maybe church basements I'm not sure. And that ultimately led to deeper and deeper involvement in Newark itself.

At the time CORE itself had lots of activities. At the White Castle, doing some testing, the fair housing kind of activities and involved in other demonstrations like the Barringer demonstration. So that's how I got involved I guess at the time it was purely ideologically.

The Civil Rights Movement was one of the first movements I'd ever seen that seemed to be telling the truth. It wasn't left, it wasn't right, it wasn't touched by the ambiguities of the Cold War. It just seemed the truth.

These awful situations in the South and discovered that the situation in Newark, it wasn't Jim Crow in that classical way, but it was just as bad in many ways.

So that was my first involvements which ultimately led to politics. I don't know if you want to talk about this but one of the people most involved in that period, not directly with CORE was Derrick Wynans [3:14] Derrick, I'm speaking now knowing a lot more than I did at the time was clearly intent on becoming the Chairman of the Democratic Party in Essex County. And so he was always on the lookout, he was a very young man, younger than me, but coming out of Harvard and the Harvard democrats and the Kennedy presidential campaign, and so he was clearly looking for people to be involved with, get involved in his goals which were really—I don't mean to make him too personal but—I think was very deeply committed on the civil rights thing but that clearly was his intention, to get in control of the Essex County Democratic Party.

So Derrick must've seen me, saw me as a young professor, somebody who might be helpful, might be an ally, so he involved me in his various projects, some mostly political projects.

CURVIN: Could you try to say something about what were your perceptions of the city around that time? As a professional academic, a white member of the community, how did you see issues or things in the city?

FRED: I think back; it was very strange. I've even said this to people, I went to college with at Rutgers in Newark, how even though we were in Newark every day, how little we knew about the city, it just wasn't there.

This was earlier than the civil rights movement, so for that period up to '53 there I was coming to Newark every day and I had no idea what was going on in the city, what the city looked like, was

just broad street and Washington Park and department stores. Then I was in the service for three years and then I was at Berkley for several years and then came back again to teach at Rutgers in Newark and in some ways it was the same thing, the city looked the same and I had no idea before I got involved with CORE, I had just no sense at all of the reality of Newark.

If you would've told me there were a lot of poor people, I probably would've said yes, but to know it, it just wasn't there. It was just a place.

CURVIN: So you got engaged in CORE and you participated in some of the activities that CORE was engaged in. Did you participate in any of the employment actions at CORE, do you recall?

FRED: I believe that I—

CURVIN: You mentioned the Barringer demonstration, talk a little bit about that experience there.

FRED: Well that was certainly—I was teaching European History and so here I thought 'my God, I am in some of the historical revolutionary moments' virtually, this very dramatic protest at Barringer.

It really seemed like history was going on. I did have some involvement—it seemed to me that I was involved in a lot of little things and never—I don't think you never quite found a place for me where I could just be but we did some testing in some of the suburbs on housing and I remember being involved with an employment project.

I think at the time Bob Bender and ADA may have been involved in it too, it's sort of funny thinking about it now, was called the Compensatory Preferential Treatment (CPT) was what the whole goal was and I remember going to a company, maybe two companies, just asking we met with, I don't think the chief executives but high level people and just asked them "how many Black people were on your staff?" That sort of thing, I can't recall exactly where that was. And you know I can remember one company said well how'd you get to pick us. You could pick anybody from the telephone book and get the same kind of response I think.

So there was that and—trying to think—and then demonstrations themselves right in the city. I still remember the White Castle demonstrations which thinking about it even think I think 'this maybe a little over the top'.

CURVIN: There was a particular time when the demonstrators at White Castle all were arrested, were you there that evening?

FRED: I don't think so. I must not have been at that one.

CURVIN: As you think back in that time, what do you think were the most significant accomplishments of CORE in that period? And of the civil rights movement I guess I should say?

FRED: I guess it's that they really raised the whole level of consciousness. As I said, you could come to Newark and not have any idea of what was the reality of the city and after being

involved with CORE and the politics at the time you just in fact became very conscious of the awful situation in some parts of Newark and I think CORE people raised the level of awareness in Essex county northern New Jersey in general as to the reality of Newark.

CURVIN: And that reality was in your mind?

FRED: Oh just the overwhelming poverty, and of course the discrimination that was just part of the daily life of people.

CURVIN: Now were you still engaged to Newark in 1967?

FRED: Uh trying to think.

CURVIN: That's the year of the explosion.

FRED: In some ways I must've been Bob, but I can't recall exactly. Certainly I was not in the city during the outburst. I certainly had a lot of contact with people who talked about it.

CURVIN: What about in 1969, leading up to the campaign for the mayor? [26:32]

FRED: Yes, I was very involved with George Richardson, I had been involved with his United Committee for Political Freedom and ran on their ticket.

I was involved when there was the recall of the Southward Councilman at the time, Lee Bernstein, he was replaced by Reverend Sharper. I was pretty closely involved in an awful lot of that. I was involved with Ken Gibson's first campaign in 1966. Again when I say involved somehow I was part of it, I knew a lot of people involved, I don't think I was in any sense a part of the political operation at all but at the time John Davis and Derrick Wynans and Bernie War [25:20] I was pretty closely involved with them. And so I assumed for a long time that Ken would be the candidate—let me back up—what I was going to say was that I remember John Davis who I think was really an incredibly insightful person, just astonishing, make you wince at times but I remember John being very worried that in fact the first campaign would be embarrassing. That there would be so few votes and as it turned out, it made a significant impact and so he became the clear likely candidate four years from then, when it got to the second campaign.

By that time, I was still quite to George Richardson, George was the assemblyman, played this role in the Southward recall and I think was more or less committed to Gibson and in fact Ken had an early campaign meeting at Joan and my's house in South Orange.

When I say it was the first campaign meeting, it may have been one of the first with a reasonably large crowd, you know 30 people or something like that came to our house and we had them in our backyard.

At some point George made that decision and I do think it was after the event at our house, some point made that decision that the track that Ken was on because of the events going on in Black communities of Newark were going to lessen the possibilities of success.

So George did finally declare himself a candidate and was trying to present himself as representing a kind of integrationist dual stance, that, that was a still viable and necessary stance in Newark politics in the day.

But with his failure I guess I sort of retreated from a lot of direct Newark activity and by that time I was beginning to work in Trenton, so I was commuting from South Orange to Trenton.

CURVIN: One of the points about George's realization that he wasn't going to be the candidate in 1970 was the occurrence of the Black and Puerto Rican convention that endorsed Ken and sort of brought the community together around his candidacy.

FRED: Right, I'd probably take a different perspective on it than that. As far as I could see and I think Newark political history would bear me out, the Black community didn't need a convention to select a candidate, they could've used the normal election process, which in fact they did, they voted against George and the voted for Ken.

Maybe the endorsement of the convention was certainly a big part of that but the same thing would have occurred anyway. And remember Ken, too me, was in some ways a more plausible middleclass respectable kind of person than George was.

George's background was certainly very interesting but he wouldn't be persuasive to even the business community as a perspective mayor.

CURVIN: Let's say a little bit more about George because in retrospect he was a real heroic figure in that period. Give me your ideas about his contribution to the struggle for justice that was occurring in the city at that time.

FRED: Well clearly he came out of the political background that had led to Addonizio's first election. That Addonizio, at least the way I read it now, he had managed to oust Carlin because he had found a way to ally himself with Black somewhat-leadership but certainly up and coming leadership, and George was part of that process he and "Hunting Ward" [19:17] had worked for Addonizio and then received these rewards Hunting became the permanent central ward chairmen of the Democratic Party, George worked in the city government and then, as we talked about earlier, he clearly made a decision [inaudible 18:39]

There must've been other activity before then but the dramatic activity associated with CORE he somehow associated with. I don't know what his exact relationship with CORE was but he made that decision. I have to believe it just came out of genuine solidarity.

CURVIN: He had some very interesting associations with people who were very supportive of him, like Tommy Edwards.

FRED: By the time I knew George well, certainly he had a group of people around him who seemed to be willing to follow George. Obviously they made a choice that they liked him. They liked him, they liked what he was trying to do. Tommy Edwards, he was from one of the labor unions, if I think hard enough I can remember which union.

CURVIN: Asphalt Workers.

FRED: Asphalt, right, and provided I think a lot of money for George, plus other, you know, the support that the union itself meant. Somebody like Joe Scrimiger [16:47] Joe who was deeply involved with church activities, was very close to Horace Sharper [16:35] and Joe, again, associated with George all those years really seemed to be genuinely moved by him to support him and he was going in the right direction. I'm trying to think who else.

JOAN: Johnny Johnson or...

FRED: Johnny Johnson, I guess she was from the ILGWU, I mean this was a period in which, from a white perspective, you're beginning to understand, the role of a lot of Black women, how powerful and important they were, they really did do the work kind of thing.

So Johnny was there and Johnny and I were very close too. Johnny, she was so genuine, so real. In a sense her endorsement of George would legitimize my association with George as did Tommy Edwards, there must've been other people. John Cockson [15:20] who was Johnny Jonson's friend and Duke Moore, I don't know a lot about Duke's background but at any rate George had clearly assembled a group of people around him who saw him as persuasive, saw him as, if not their leader, somebody who they could follow and support in a political way.

CURVIN: I asked you about the impact of this experience and it certainly raised your consciousness as well as raising the consciousness of untold numbers of people. As you think back about the experience, what would you draw from it that you would want to tell young people today? What was important about that experience that would be useful for young people of this age?

FRED: Two things that come to my mind are probably contradictory in a way. First of all, I think looking back on it, it was really a tremendous experience as I said, sort of epic virtually, it's feel but in truth the reality was Newark was still there. Even some of the triumphs, let's say if you think Ken Gibson's election was a triumph, certainly the election of a Black mayor, Black control of the political structure in Newark was a triumph, the truth was that the society kept going on anyway, and I think myself that probably the civil rights activities advanced the election of a Black mayor by one term that the natural numbers would sooner or later turn out so advancing it by one mayoralty term or 4 years was important.

So to a young person I would probably say so keep that perspective because reality is reality so don't get—get involved with it but just keep some perspective on the whole thing. The second aspect which is somewhat contradictory again I keep coming back to Derrick Wynans [12:19] but anyway CORE and the political activity, it engaged people, it really did activate people if you will. So though I always thought a lot about politics and thought of myself in some ways as a political theorist all that kind of thing, but to be activated to be in the process was just wonderful and that's what happened in that period, the activation.

CURVIN: And do you think this activation was an edifying experience or is a draining and—

FRED: Both.

CURVIN: It's both.

FRED: It was certainly edifying and it certainly effected all of my political life since then.

CURVIN: In what way?

FRED: I still use—that's my basic model of an election, what does this do as far as race is concerned in the country.

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CURVIN: Joan why don't you just start by just—who you are, what your name is, where you're from, when you got to New Jersey, to Newark etcetera.

JOAN: I'm Joan Waring, I was born in Newark, I grew up in Bloomfield but I went to college in Newark, I went to Rutgers Newark, I was in the college of nursing and although I am no longer a nurse, it was one of the most important experiences I had as a young person for many reasons but as it relates to Newark it brought me to Martland [10:15] Medical Center and had to spend time there working with patients and seeing some of the most horrific things I have ever seen in my life in terms of care, in terms of desperation and destituteness, so that was a quite remarkable experience. And also related to that was not only Martland but for some reason we had to go into the projects a few times which was again—

CURVIN: You mean housing projects?

JOAN: Yes, which was, for a young rather innocent young woman was very eye opening and to see how people had to live what the situations were.

Then after I finished college, we moved to Berkley for graduate school, I started graduate school at Berkley, I stopped because I had two babes. While Berkley was pretty much a transformative experience, and with Fred we talked about a lot of things and really sort of came to the conclusion that race was the issue of our generation, and that race was something that we were going to have to think about, and do something about.

Not knowing exactly what but that was sort of an intellectual decision, and that the making it happen part came when we came back to New Jersey. And when we came back to New Jersey we came back to Forest Hills Gardens, which was an apartment complex in Bloomfield and I guess we'll talk about that later.

And while there, there was one Saturday morning, as we went out to the grocery store. We were wheeling babies or whatever, we saw that there was a demonstration. As a matter of fact, I think I came back and said to Fred, there's something going on, let's look into it. It turned out to be CORE and while we were in Bloomfield, that within the compound almost of Forest Hill, there were a lot of people that were left and that had moved there from New York City and we became part of that group of really sort of political activist and very much committed to racial justice and we continued to be part of trying to be good people while there.

In terms of my own involvement with Newark per-say, the activities of CORE, my job was to call people and tell them that there was going to be a demonstration like at Western Electric, and that often every few calls I would have to ask, will you go? And are you willing to be arrested?

And so it was a two-part question and sometimes I got well I'll go but I don't want to be arrested, and if I am going to be arrested I don't want to go, but other people went.

I tried to recall who was on that list and the only person I really remember was Ken Gibson. That was sort of my major CORE activity besides being involved in the CORE piece at Forest Hill.

And then there was a lawsuit at Forest Hill in which Bob Curvin was somehow involved and Carey Rubenstein [5:41] and I recall that event, sitting in a court room in Newark and Bob being called out because his son was born.

But Fred and I also did housing testing mostly in East Orange on behalf of CORE and we were a good couple to do that. We looked young and innocent and had two blonde toddlers and looked like a kind of tenant, if you allowed children, you would want to have. We were fairly successful in getting the apartment and getting the people who followed us not get it, even though we had declined it.

Also we went to many demonstrations in Newark, some of the ones that are the most vivid to me are the ones led by John Davis and the new more militant NAACP, the signs for the new NAACP. We had our children with us and we tell them that the first song they learned was 'We Shall Overcome'. We went to those and then we were... again, Fred was involved in the politics, I was somewhat ancillary but supportive. I can remember sort of thinking that in many situations especially with George Richardson and that gang that we were sort of the whites who integrated the groups at \_\_\_\_ Tavern [3:50] or other places that we went that were political meetings or political social events.

CURVIN: Now you went to the March on Washington, what kind of experience was that for you?

JOAN: For me it was almost a moment of ecstasy that I can still hear the I Have a Dream Speech, that we – after we finally found a bus and got on a bus and went down various people had brought bourse [3:07] and all kinds of things for nourishment or something on the bus but then we got there and we were in the crowds and it was so exhilarating. It was really beyond inspirational it was sort of ecstatic at times. It was one of the most important events of my life— situations I've been in.

CURVIN: How long have you conveyed or translated this experience to your children for example?

JOAN: They were a part of it when they were young, it was just very natural, you treat people as individuals, you support things. I remember when I grew up, my father, sort of taking me aside when I was about 8 or 9 years old and said you always vote for the working man, that's the rule and there was sort of something like that. We have one daughter who is a Quaker now and is very political, or has been and is very politically oriented. The other daughter-ehh- but they remember going on lots of picnics related to the Newark experience and that but Ramsey at the time we moved there, was not a town with that many minorities, except as we arranged visits with people, the minorities.

CURVIN: If you were standing in front of a class of young people today what two or three or even one point would you tell them about the importance of this experience you had in the 60s?

JOAN: Well I guess I would say that if you really want to feel good about yourself in certain contexts, do what's right and do what's fair and care about justice.

CURVIN: Terrific, thank you.